

Conversations With K

(Toronto - London, Ont. - Montreal)

April, 1965

The period between the issuance of the two visas (one of them cancelled) for K's trip to Canada was TWO WEEKS. He says he had absolutely no knowledge of the possibility of leaving any sooner, and was not notified when the first visa was issued, but there is a logical explanation for this: such things are not known until the last minute (two days in K's case) and this state of affairs is generally accepted.

Neither is it generally known who is going overseas. Certain persons are approached first and asked whether they would like to apply. (Well, that's the way it's done here, too, isn't it?" asked.).

A person may tell his closest friends that he is going, or it is possible for someone like K to figure out for himself who may possibly go.

He waited a year and a half from the time of the application until he went. In that time he tried to find out as much as he could about North America, mainly from persons who had been here. Mykola Zarudnyj, who was here with Kolossova, was one of such persons. Another was Alim ANTONOV, who was an exchange student at Princeton.

Alim lives near K's hospital, and frequently he would see K coming to work and yell out: "Hello, when are you going?" or "Hello, any news yet?". When K would reply that there is no news, Alim would comfort him by saying, "Don't worry, I had to wait two years."

The waiting period began to get on K's nerves, and he started to raise hell. Invariably some official would tell him, "But Korotych, why are you worried, of course you're going." At the beginning of 1965 he began to worry about his vacation plans for this year, and through Malchuk he let it be known that he is sick and tired and

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wants to forget the whole thing. This helped, apparently, K got a visa.

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The day it became known that K is going, he had a day off, so reshchyay z MIDI (cars from the Ministry of External Affairs) we sent out all over Kiev to look for him. K commented that this is how things are generally done -- first no action for months, and then everyone begins to panic.

K did speculate on why it was he who was chosen to go to Canada. One logical explanation is that a person should be active in community affairs. He should represent something or some organization, because then that organization also kicks in a few dollars for the trip. K fits this scheme, because he is in the KMO (Committee of Youth Organizations -- he called it a sort of External Affairs Dept. -- a youth z "MIDI", and is also the vice president of Kiev's Creative Youth organization.

For this reason, he said, it would be harder for such persons as Lina Kostenko, Svitlychnyy or Sverstyuk to be sent out. They are not active in anything. Brach could possibly go, because he is just below Pavlychko, as one of the officers of the Kiev Writers' Com. Party Committee. But then he added that all these people would talk too much if they were here, and he, K, knows better when he should keep his mouth shut. Vinhranovskyy, as a possible candidate is also not very good. K recalled that V was to go to Helsinki, but a week before going he lost his passport and could not go. V then began to swear at all the officials (mentioning their mothers in the process) for preventing him from going to Helsinki.

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K seemed confident that these days the authorities would not be able to get rid of him, or those like him. "Those thousands of persons who demand our books, and who rip off our buttons at poetry readings would be looking for them too much."

K disagreed, and said what if they were to put him up in a mental institution and make it known that as the result of his unfortunate fall on the stairs, he went crazy. He also quoted a line of his poetry, saying that the final comment would be "what tragic ending befall the geniuses." On hearing this I became very serious and quiet for a few moments. It seemed as if he had not considered this possibility.

On another occasion he said "they" would not be able to send him to another Cambodia. "I got out of it once already, didn't I?" and said that he would again pull all the strings he could.

He did say once that he might try to "work his way into some mission abroad, or get a correspondent accreditation."

As for his meetings with K & R, and the probable trouble he might have as the result, when he returns, K said he did not tell them anything, and if the authorities were to question him, he can with clear conscience repeat everything he told them. He said that if he is questioned, it will probably be by the boys from "MIDI" but he admitted they might be KGB, for all he knows. Some of his friends are in the KGB, and he knows them; about others one can only guess. If he is questioned by "MIDI" then he will have to assume that it is "MIDI" that is questioning him.

He said there is no secret that Kieu's "Dynamo" is a KGB team. The back sports club has some sponsor, and KGB sponsors the "Dynamo". He laughed, and said that an animal was on a wrestling team for a time, which was also sponsored by the KGB.

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VISIT TO USA

The reason K did not take a visa to US, was that he had absolutely nothing to do with it. He was given a passport with a visa to Canada.

When told that kids still for instance have visas for Great Britain and USA as well as Canada before he left, K replied, "Well, I'm not Fidzinski."

After his conversation with Ambassador Shpedko (on Good Friday in Montreal's Rita Carlton Hotel), K came back with the news that perhaps he should not try to go to the US this time for only the two days, because then it would be in his record that he had been to the US, and when another opportunity came to go again for a longer stay, he would possibly be bypassed. This is what Shpedko told him. But Shpedko did not refuse permission outright, leaving the door open by saying, "We'll talk about it when you come to Canada" (May 7). Shpedko also gave K Koshelivets' book "Suchasna literatura v Ukr" (the thing edition), saying that's all they had at the embassy of the entire books, which have something about K in them. K already had that book, but said "How could I refuse the Ambassador this great kindness." He said Prolog should send such things to the embassies and missions. They might do some good.

KMO

The Committee of Youth Organizations looks after such things as relations with other countries' youth organizations for purposes of travel and festivals. A youthful unit he called it. It was not KMO that called it in before the Shevchenko Festival (to prevent any trouble) but the CO of Komsomol.

KUB

K explained said that KUB is made up of Ukrainians to a great extent. Some of them are old friends. That is KUB, in Ukraine.

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has become more "intelligent". That is to say, more young members of the intelligentsia have entered its ranks -- persons with education.

#### POPULATION

K has a considerably low opinion of the Ukrainian population. He would like to see it on a higher level, but unfortunately is not. He repeated on several occasions that if tomorrow, the red flags were replaced by the blue-and-gold, most of the people would be "very much surprised."

Right now K finds a serious dilemma: he needs a year and a half to do nothing else but work on his dissertation. This would mean that another textbook, in Ukrainian would be made available for Ukraine. It would also mean that he would be able to keep his present position in the Institute (the best in the USSR), because this position requires a person with a Candidate's degree. But then a lot of his time is taken up with the education of the masses; writing, translating, and reading of poetry (twice or three times a week). This takes time, but it is something that has to be done. He feels that until the new ranks of people come to replace him and the others, he has to continue doing what he is doing.

#### ANTI-SEMITISM

K has Kichko's book at home. Not the popular edition, but one of the 50 copies of this dissertation (it was originally a dissertation), which is sent out to libraries and institutions. This edition contains no cartoons, for instance. When K suggested that it was Moscow's trick to publish the book in Kiev and thus to make Ukrainians seem anti-Semitic,

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K's reply was: "You mean to say you don't think there is anti-Semitism in Ukraine?" He said, for example, that the Ukrainian embroidered shirt is popularly known as antysemitska. He lives in a co-op building, where only people who have money live, because the apartments have to be bought (20 rubles a month for a co-op, plus downpayment; 3-5 rubles a month for a state assigned apartment, and no downpayment). Consequently most of the neighbors are Jews (jewellers, etc.). His wife refers to the neighbors (in a letter) as nashi pravoslavni (our orthodoxers). That's both good and bad, said K. These neighbors, for instance, want the elevators to stop running at night, because they make noise (so he frequently throws a bottle down the garbage shaft /not incinerator/, just in spite, to make some noise). On the other hand, his wife wrote that it was thanks to the pravoslavni who were complaining, that they now have hot water seven days a week, not three as before.

/The reason K has Kichko's book is that he collects all books dealing with religions. He recently wrote seven poems on world's religions, and friends were able to obtain the special copy of Kichko's book for him./

#### PHRASEBOOK

The trial lasted only one day, after an investigation of about two months. He and others were yelling that Poh. deserved a bullet. K attended only the morning session of the trial.

#### BOOKS

K reads very rapidly -- almost everything he can lay his hands on. He learned Polish, only to be able to read some things not available in either Ukrainian or Russian. The copy of Pravda Kobzaryya he received in Iasiolini, K read and gave Novykhance, "because it was written to him, not to me."

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